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ABSTRACT

It is the right and responsibility of every community to take charge of the provision of preschool educare for its children. Many dispossessed communities in South Africa have lacked the skills necessary to organize and manage educare projects and schools. Many current educare projects are often completely or partially controlled by organizations or people outside of the community. A prime task of organizations in the educare field must be the transfer of information and knowledge to communities so that they can take charge of preschool educare provision. To address the twin problems of lack of skills and outside control, the Grassroots Educare Trust has developed community organization and financial training curricula that aim to empower community groups with the skills necessary to effectively and efficiently control preschool educare. The community organization training curricula consists of 12 workshop sessions on the following topics: (1) the educare community; (2) the educare center; (3) premises; (4) meeting procedure; (5) the process of deciding; (6) problem solving; (7) the constitution; (8) ways of looking after money; (9) budgeting; (10) techniques for fundraising and applying to funders; (11) interpersonal relationships; and (12) relationships with other organizations. (MDM)

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EMPOWERING ADULTS IN THE EDUCARE COMMUNITY THROUGH ORGANISATION AND FINANCIAL TRAINING

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It is the right and responsibility of every community to take charge of the provision of preschool educare. For a number of reasons people have lacked the skills for successful project management. To address this Grassroots Educare Trust has developed Community Organisation and Financial Training curricula which aim to empower community groups with the skills necessary to effectively and efficiently control preschool educare. This paper discusses community control, empowerment of communities and the training opportunities available in this area.

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Introduction

Each and every community has the right and responsibility to take charge of the provision of early childhood education and care for their young children. This means that the power to make decisions about educare provision lies within communities and specifically with its parents.

But what is power ? It refers to 'the capacity of some persons and organisations to produce intended, foreseen and unforeseen effects on others' (van der Eyken , 1989). Being powerless then means to have others make decisions which have intended, foreseen and unforeseen effects on you. We know that when power is exerted in an oppressive manner this leads to a negative self-image, loss of pride and confidence, and worst of all alienation.

Adults and children in this country have been made powerless, robbed of their self-esteem and confidence; denied skills, opportunities, choices and access to resources because of race and poverty. These adults include the parents of South Africa's 6.3 million preschool children. What effect does this have on our children ? Should empowerment of parents be on the agenda of early childhood educare activists and advocates ? The answer is clearly: Yes, we must empower parents.
This is best expressed by Govender (1987) who said at the Free to Be Conference in Cape Town that ;

> 'It is only when individuals and communities are able to gain control over their lives, when they are to exercise choices and take decisions for themselves, that effective change both of their own and their children's life situation becomes feasible.Thus it is only through the empowerment of the disadvantaged that disadvantage itself can be overcome'.

Empowerment

Empowerment is an intentional continuous process which shifts the perceptions of powerless individuals, groups and communities, and enables them to assume greater capacity, and access to and control over resources which affect their lives. People usually desire power because of an imbalance which exists, and which disables them, alienates them and which denies them the basic right of control over their own lives. Perceptions of self and others play a major role in feelings of powerlessness. Empowerment expands the capacity of those defined as powerless to take control of their lives.

Assumptions underlying Empowerment

We believe that all people have strengths. We believe that people have the right to decide for themselves how community needs should be met and how community educare provision services should be organised and maintained. An imbalance in power relations between funders, educare agencies and the authorities on the one hand, and communities on the other, is counter-productive to the effective provision of educare. Whilst outside intervention and control is often more efficient, effectiveness is almost always lost. Things may get done but this is usually by someone else and produces a relationship of dependency.

Outcomes of the Empowerment process

As has been said empowerment is a process rather than a one-off product, and it is about perceptions, understandings and skills acquisition. Outcomes are evident at three levels - individual, organizational and national.

At the individual level, empowerment through the acquisition of skills and knowledge increases the individual's control over her life, her self-esteem and her sense of belonging to the community. An example of this is a woman in New Crossroads, Cape Town who, on becoming the Treasurer at a community-controlled project, was trained in the necessary skills, perfected the job and went on to become an administrator at a local primary school where the skills she had acquired proved invaluable.

At the organisational level, empowerment means increasing the power of groups so that they gain access to and control over resources. For example, a group of mothers in that same New Crossroads community had a need for the educare of their children. The local Educare project was overcrowded and there was no other building which could be used. This group was able to raise R 140,000 for a building, help with the design, advise the contractor and see the project to completion. We advised and supported the group who accepted some of our advice and rejected some of our advice. We were invited to the opening function soon afterwards.

At the national level, changes in policy and practice are usually made as a result of the community having empowered itself. The community action of the past decade has resulted in the situation which we have today where people are taking control. It is only through local communities empowering themselves and equipping themselves that the people shall govern.

Community Control of Early Childhood Educare

Early Childhood Educare is an area in which the apartheid regime has not taken formal responsibility. This has enabled

communities to take control of the educare of their children. The negative side of this has been little or no state financial support.

Various forms of Educare control exist in South Africa. Firstly, there are those projects in which an outside organisation has full control over the day-to-day activities of the Educare project. Parents and the wider community have little or no say in running the project and are expected to fundraise only. Even here all income generated from fundraising may go to the organisation. The rationale for this approach is patronising - the community needs our help, we must teach them the correct (in other words our) way to do things.

In the second case, the Educare project belongs to an outside organisation through membership or affiliation. Here the project has been granted some power but this is very limited. For example, a parent may sit on the executive committee of the controlling organisation, they may fundraise and spend the money raised themselves, and they may purchase equipment within a budgeted figure. They do not however, make policy, employ staff or control income and expenditure.

In the third case, the project is controlled by the community and more particularly by the parents. This means that they are responsible for all that happens in the project. They make policy, employ staff, decide on curricula and programmes, must balance their books, they own or rent the building themselves, and account only to the parent body and funders. Clearly this is the form of control which we advocate.

So by community control we do not mean 'in consultation with', 'in partnership with' or 'delegated power'. By

community control we mean that the community has full responsibility for policy decisions, and organisation and management of the project with no intermediaries between it and the source of funds.

Because of the State's lack of involvement and concern for young children we do not have to wait for political victory before communities take control of educare provision. We do not need piecemeal or incremental strategies. Communities can control the educare of their children now. Because of historical oppression through the denial of access to training and skills, job reservation, and poor basic education, many parent and community groups are not adequately equipped to control educare projects effectively. What is needed is to equip parents for this task. This is where the educare agency and professional workers come in.

The Role of the Professional in the Empowerment process

Power is not there to be given. It cannot be packaged and dispensed. Rather it is there to be taken by communities. However, to empower themselves community members need skills, information and knowledge which professionals, for various reasons, have.

The professional working in the community has a specific role to play in the empowerment process. The task is to pass on information and knowledge, and to equip individuals with the skills required to take power. The relationship between professional and community must be a complementary one, not hierarchical in nature in which the professional is teacher and the community dependant on him. Professionals can best contribute by providing opportunities for communities to acquire skills. Learning opportunities and situations must be developed to enable the community to assume power.

So how does Grassroots Educare Trust go about doing this ?

When a community group approaches Grassroots for assistance we explain to them that we will not run their project for them, that we will not make decisions which they should be making, that we will not control them and that they cannot join us as members. From day one, when we first interact with a community group, we respect their autonomy. This means accepting that our role as a training and resource agency is limited to training, advice giving and support, and that full decision-making authority lies with the community group. This is difficult for some professionals to interpret given that years of training (usually tertiary) have instilled in many a belief that they are there 'to solve people's problems'. This patronising approach must change. People have the capacity to control their own educare projects effectively and efficiently.

We do inform them that we have certain training programmes which they can attend and which we believe will equip them to organise and manage their projects. We also inform them that in participating in these programmes they will be party to determining the content of the curricula, constructing their own knowledge, that what they learn will be what they want to learn, and that much of what they wish to know they have already experienced.

The two courses which we offer to community groups are **Community Organisation Training** and **Financial Training**. Let us look at them separately.

Community organisation skills are required in order to be able to run community projects effectively. A major part of the Educare project's activities revolve around general organisation management, that is, seeing that :

* the constitution is followed
* meetings are held and well run
* good decisions are made and implemented
* problems are solved
* the building is well maintained
* interpersonal relationships are good
* relations with other organisations in the field are established
* the money is well looked after
* fundraising is done
* there is a budget.

The Community Organisation Training Curriculum consists of 12 workshop sessions around the following topics ;

The Educare Community
The Educare Centre
Premises
Meeting Procedure
The Process of Deciding
Problem Solving
The Constitution
How to Look after the Money
Budgeting
Fundraising and Applying to Funders
Interpersonal Relationships
Relationships with other Organisations.

Each workshop lasts for approximately two hours. Learning is active and as much of the experiences and knowledge of the trainees as possible is used. Each session begins with an appropriate warm-up, has a core section with practical tasks, report-backs, and a summary of information and of the learning which has taken place provided by both the trainer and trainees. The Grassroots community worker's role is facilitative and supportive.

In order to reach more people and thereby address the huge national need we are also able to offer training of Trainers. Intensive week-long residential courses are being run in Cape Town and, on invitation, at other venues around the country.

Arising out of the need of communities to run their projects from a sound financial base we have also developed a Financial Training Curriculum which expands upon the three financial units of the Community Organisation Training curriculum. Here committee treasurers and administrators work through and develop the financial record keeping (bookkeeping) skills required for sound financial management of educare projects. The curriculum covers setting up a recording system, the recording process, operating bank accounts, reporting to funders, and covers budgeting and fundraising in more detail than in the Community Organisation Curriculum. Because of the nature of the subject matter, training takes place locally on a one-to-one basis - though this can be expensive, it is the most effective.

Training of trainers - again in order to address the huge national need - is taking place in block sessions in Cape Town and can also be done, on invitation, at other venues aound the country.

Summary

We believe in the empowerment of people and communities. We believe that people have knowledge and experiences that form the basis of their learning. We believe that learning should be active and participatory. A prime task of organisations in the early childhood educare field must be the transfer of community organisation and financial skills, information and knowledge to communities so that they can take charge of preschool educare provision. We believe that the Grassroots Educare Trust's Community Organisation and Financial Training curricula do this.

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